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Faces of Burma, December 1- 16, 2014, a Photo Safari led by Donald Lyon

December 1, 2014 Assemble in Yangon: Ten eager photographers plus their even more eager guides met at 3PM today in the Chatrium Hotel lobby. Don provided a small map and Burmese phrase list. Our Shan guide, Sai Woon Sone, known as Daniel, introduced himself and soon we were all off to the East Entrance of the *Shwedagon Pagoda* (most important Buddhist site in Myanmar). This is the most auspicious entrance for locals so a stop here gave us the opportunity to get acquainted with Burmese life. The fish and turtles in the pond here earn merit for their donors. Small wooden Buddhas are being carved; great marble Buddhas are sold and a myriad of food stalls energize the scene. Now that we have had this quick introduction to Burmese life and have determined that all camera systems are “Go” we are ready to enter the Pagoda by the South entrance where the elevator takes us barefoot up to the large base where we have 1.5 hours from soft afternoon light through dusk to dark circumnavigating the Pagoda. Don has provided everyone with their birth days and the animal associated with that day so that they can perform or photograph the ritual of pouring cups of water over the small Buddha replica at their station—one for every year of your birth, for example. Don points out some of his favorite images such as the small mirrors that make up kaleidoscope-like images with the great golden dome. The dome was being re-gilded during our visit—hence the bamboo mats. Groups of women, the *Monday Club*, eagerly swept the cool marble deck and we had to keep ahead of them. As the sky turned lapis lazuli blue, candles were lit to emphasize the prayers of the faithful. The radiating neon lights cast curious halos around many of the Buddhas in niches and ancillary shrines. At 6:15 all had reassembled at the Tuesday Corner with tales of images captured. The Seafood Buffet tonight at the Chatrium offers cooked-to-order seafood of every description and cuisine plus a complimentary beverage—make that a *Myanmar* beer, *jei zu beh*.

Dec. 2 Around Yangon: We gathered at 8AM after breakfast to drive to the Yangon River Jetty where “the old flotilla lay” in Kipling’s words—rusting cargo/passenger ships built during the British Raj by the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company. Hundreds of small “swallowtail” boats brought commuters from the communities in the delta to work in Yangon—their Chinese diesels screaming like banshees (just a few years ago they were all row boats). We captured stevedores carrying 125 pound sacks of sand for the new building boom in Yangon. They each carried a counting stick to keep track of inventory. The adventure these days is crossing the Strand Road back to the bus—so much new traffic. Toilets were available at the Confucian Temple nearby. Daniel now led the group through Chinatown’s crowded streets and markets for a great number of interesting grab shots (it was so crowded) Don gathered up the stragglers and advised all to practice “creating order from chaos”.



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Easy to say Don. Driving back past the *Shwedagon* we arrived at *Chaukhtatgyi Paya*, the giant reclining Buddha. Astrologers had predicted, by examining his feet at birth, that young Prince Siddhartha would become a great leader. We examined them, too, from a scaffolding which allowed a full length view showing the soles of the feet. Lunch was at the *Green Elephant* –delicious curried beef and fish. Don introduced the group to fresh lime and soda as a lunchtime beverage. From 2-3:30 R&R at the Chatrium then out to *Botauhuang Pagoda* to explore this neighborhood of monasteries. For some unknown reason there were very few monks to engage in conversation and photography but one genial monk kept his pose for us—one brown face in a sea of saffron robes drying. We spent the sunset further up river where the evening commute was underway—same loud boats and swarms of people. We hoped to silhouette the old flotilla against a flaming sky. Dinner was at the *Golden Duck* with photo-worthy scenes of the *Shwedagon* framed in palm trees and reflections in the pools. After dinner we made a stop at People's Park for more *Shwedagon* long shots. Note: Reception for the King of Norway is at our hotel, busy tonight.

Dec. 3—Yangon to Lake Inle: Another hot day in Yangon—some had a swim but all were ready for the 9:15 departure to the airport. An easy hour's flight brought us to *Heho Airport*. Those with window seats observed the neat patterns of crops with golden rice, white flowered mustard and yellow flowered sesame. Red iron-rich soil indicated fallow fields. The hilltop villages belong to the *Pa'O* people. Near the airport a small café served the best Shan Noodles around—prepared by Daniel. More dishes followed and massages were offered at a price we couldn't refuse.--\$2. A *Pa'O* man arrived with wild bee honeycombs for sale. We made it worth his while to pose with his sweet discovery bought one of his sticky treats. Driving down to *Nyang Shwe* we stopped for a group of women winnowing rice by standing on a stool. The backgrounds were not so good so some got in close with wide angles shooting up at the bemused winnower. Toilet stop in town then the 12 of us loaded onto three large cargo canoes powered by long-tail diesels and settled back for the hour's cruise some 20 miles down lake. The front person on each canoe was designated to toss tofu chips to the gulls so that the others could get some nice full frame soaring portraits. Best to keep mouths closed at such times. As we entered the lake a group of *Intha* fisherman waited to demonstrate their considerable acrobatic skills which only vaguely mimicked the movements performed by real fishermen. Still—they were very good photo ops and we made the best of the situation. We stopped several more times for real fishermen, leg rowing, and setting out their nets. As we cruised into the *Golden Isles Cottages* compound the *Pa'O* staff gathered to welcome us with gongs, cymbals and drums—plus a welcome cup of hot green tea. Dinner at 7PM with a Cultural Performance including the famous Puppet



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Man and the flaming martial arts dance. Delicious dinner, too! Quite cool as we return to our cabanas over the water—no need for the mosquito nets—though they lend atmosphere.

Dec. 4 Inle Lake: Extra blankets appreciated last night. Up at 6AM to enjoy the misty scene around us. 8AM departure in the canoes. We cruised past floating gardens of tomatoes and bean before arriving at the island location of the Five Buddha Pagoda, *Phaung Daw Oo*. Daniel took some to see the venerated gold lumps. There were several arrivals of boatloads of family members accompanying boys, dressed up like Princes—they would go through the ordination process and become novice monks for a period—sort of a Buddhist Bar Mitzvah. It was market day so there was much to explore—out on the market fringes *Pa'O* in orange turbans bartered hilltop potatoes and cabbages for *Intha* grown beans, tomatoes and fish. We then cruised on to the silk and lotus fiber weaving community where the *clack clack* of the looms could be heard. One woman demonstrated the process of extracting fibers from lotus stalks to be spun into a numbly soft cloth. Old women tie-dyed silk threads and strung them on looms where young girls wove the intricate *ikat* designs. Don returned photos made on previous trips. Daniel was very helpful, assisting with poses, closing windows to block bright lights and in explaining both to us and to our subjects what was going on. On to the blacksmith's village where old truck springs were shaped and tempered and coaxed to become machetes and other implements of an agricultural society. The Cheroot making village was next. Young girls quickly rolled mild cigars made with the leaves of a local tree and small amounts of tobacco. Nearby wooden canoes were being made with tongue and grove fittings shaped by hand. A delicious lunch at the *Golden Kite* then some leisure time from 2-4:30. At 4:30 two leg rowers were ready to demonstrate their skills. Daniel directed them in a series of *pas de deux* passes both sunlit and backlit. Looking down from a small bridge gave us a unique point of view and some spectacular images. We hopped into our large canoes and followed them out into the lake for another series of choreographed shots until after the sun had set. There would be considerable editing work to do tonight!

Dec. 5 Insein Market and Lake: At 6AM we met the two legrowers from nearby *Nampan* Village. The hoped for mist was a will-o-the-wisp but by 6:30 there was some nice light. At 8 we were off to the western side of the lake with a stop first to photograph at an island village shop where five *Padong* women worked at their back-strap looms and posing for pictures. Down the canal came a barge with an elegantly dressed couple and surrounded by traditionally dressed *Intha* in dugout canoes—we had cruised right into the center of a filming of Inge Sargent's *Twilight over Burma*. Sargent was an Austrian born American married to a Shan Prince. We



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were asked to stay out of the limelight but were able to capture some nice scenes of the hundreds of extras and the Burmese stars with the matchless setting on *Lake Inle*. Then we turned our attention to the *Padong* women though our poses were a bit constrained by the film equipment taking up much of the area. Leaving the workshop we were soon cruising up the river to *In Dein* village. Bamboo weirs raised the river level for navigation by the large cargo canoes. We took 30 minutes to individually explore the market and village then gathered to follow Daniel further up the river along the covered portico leading to a monastery that had only recently reopened after many years of fighting between Karen rebel groups and the Burmese junta. Our goal were the derelict stupas, overgrown with strangler figs that lay moldering below the old monastery. Along the way, Daniel asked three young *Pa'O* girls to pose for us among the ruins. Lunch was at the *Green Bamboo Restaurant* where the tasty meal was served in beautiful black lacquer-ware offering bowls. Back at the Golden Isles we had 1.5 hours R&R until 4pm when we cruised through villages, floating gardens with their small rest houses to Jumping Cats Monastery, built over the lake. *Nga Hpe Kyaung*, the monastery, is the repository of a dozen or more altars and Buddhas from local monasteries abandoned during the years of warfare around the lake. Some of the Buddhas are made of lacquer and are over 100 years old. Alas, the monks no longer teach cats to jump, by order of the new Abbott but Daniel managed to coax one old timer out of retirement for a half-hearted jump. Back to GIC by 5:30 dusk. After dinner, the staff performed their cultural program again with several new acts.

Dec. 6-- Lake Inle to Lake Pindaya: At 6AM Dan, Ian, John and this writer hired a cargo canoe from the hotel for an hours excursion to capture unscripted leg rowing fishermen at sunrise. The hoped for mist did not materialize but we did manage to capture some nice scenes thanks to cooperative local fishermen. Mother Nature always delivers something nice at Lake Inle, too. 8:15AM departure from *Golden Isles*. We stopped at the north end of the lake for the antics of the *Intha* acrobat team and their exaggerated poses. Back on solid ground at *Nyang Shwe* we realized that it was Full Moon holiday so many shops and produce packinghouses were closed. We drove a few miles further north to *Shwe Yaunghwe*, the old wooden monastery. Daniel persuaded the Abbot to allow several novices to pose in the famous oval windows. Sun was a bit bright, though, so we moved to the less interesting north side windows, and then had a chance to explore the monastery buildings as the 11AM dinner was prepared. It was almost time for our own lunch back at *The Amazing Nyang Schwe* (after a photo stroll down the main street). After another wonderful meal we stopped along side a small canal where both men and women were bathing and washing babies and clothes—more pictures. We retraced our route back past *Heho* Airport stopping for water buffalo pulling plows and herds



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of cows munching the rice stubble after the harvest. On to the junction town of *Aung Ban* for toilets and selections of tasty unusual snacks. Now we are on a minor road where we can safely stop and stop we do. The road-widening project was of interest. Girls carried baskets of gravel that were strewn over the road then coated with hot asphalt—hand-built roads. The highlight of the afternoon was a dirt road where ox-carts were being loaded with rice-straw, water buffalo were plowing rice paddies and being bathed. Then convoys of ox-carts came lumbering along—every scene had nice backgrounds and the light was golden. Another stop or two for landscape patterns and a lovely village scene in the gloaming. Then we hot-footed it into *Pindaya* and our charming teak-paneled *Inle Inn* (owned by the same *Pa'O* co-op as GIC). Dinner was delicious from the avocado salad to the chocolate cake. Don described the photo possibilities for the next day -- the bathing along the shore, the giant banyan trees in the mist and how to prepare for photographing in the cave.

Dec. 7—Pindaya Area: Most were ready for 6AM breakfast and onboard for the 6:30 bus ride over to the giant banyan trees where the idea was to focus on the trees with the white spires of stupas (*Shwe Oo Min*) in the misty distance. Most then walked back along the lake to capture the *Taungyi* people bathing and washing along the shore, mist rising from the warm water and golden spires of stupas at the far side of the lake. At 9AM we bused up to the caves where over 9000 Buddha representations resided. The huge spider replica at the entrance recounts the story of the seven celestial princesses held captive in the cave by the spider and rescued by the Shan Prince and his magic arrow. 1.5 hours in the cave was just enough time to create our images of the Buddhas glowing in the mix of artificial light. Don urged the photographers to include *foreground, middle ground and background* in their images. Vendors with small shops outside offered green tea and *lappet*, fermented tea leaves with crispy snacks—Shan treats. Near the lake we visited the umbrella workshop where the family made *sa* paper from mulberry bark, then constructed the paper umbrellas from wooden parts cleverly manufactured before our cameras—foot powered lathe was quite ingenious. Grandma was most industrious, gluing the paper to the frame with glue made from rice. Nearby *Memento Restaurant* was our attractive lunch stop. Delicious butterfly fish and a chance to photograph a large snake—stuck in a hole, apparently after swallowing a meal larger than the hole. From 2:30-3:30 back at *Inle Inn* where there were more nature shots to be made, such as the large bee hive and the orchids. At 3:30 we captured a few landscapes of field patterns—graphic designs with trees posed at the power points. Girls were threshing and winnowing black sesame seed for oil. Nice shots in good light. We stopped at a *Danu* village to share pictures of a 104-year-old woman with two of her great grandchildren. We all had a chance to meet her and capture a



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portrait ourselves. *A three-roll day* according to Terry using a phrase from the days of 36-exposure film.

Day 8 Pindaya to Mandalay: 6 AM—a quick coffee and juice for this photographer then off to the great banyan trees in hopes of mist or some other magic. Others had plans to capture the line of red-robed novices coming out from their monastery with alms bowls in hand. Others worked the mist on the lake with bathers and some may have slept in—only they know. At 9AM we were on the bus headed back to *Heho* Airport. We made several stops for landscapes and graphic designs in nature using the white flowered mustard and yellow-flowered sesame. A girl with a heavy basket of cabbages on her head posed until her load became too heavy. John shouldered her load. Trans-loading the cabbages from ox-cart to small truck was next. Then we found tea harvesters—plucking young leaves, flowers and seed pods (seeds for planting new tea plants). Ox-carts with huge bamboo poles were next. A young boy and his father with their herd of grazing water buffalo posed for us, then ox-carts filled with rice straw. In *Aung Ban* we stopped to wash up before lunch back at the *Heho Shan Noodle café*. More massages, then the 4:40 flight to *Mandalay*. Quite beautiful skimming over the *Shan Hills* with their field patters, isolated monasteries and rugged cliffs. An hour's drive to the *Ayerwaddy View Hotel*. Dinner at 7 was on the roof with traditional music and a puppet show that introduced us to the main characters.

Day 9 Mingun and Mandalay: Eggs cooked to order then off at 8AM to nearby *Mingun Jetty* (just downstream from our hotel). Daniel asked a young lady to show how she transported the water jugs being off loaded for sale—four at a time and one in hand. We spread out to capture girls carrying heavy loads of wet sand on their heads. Pigs, kids, cooking, growing tiny gardens—every aspect of daily life laid out before us. We boarded our small riverboat for the one-hour cruise up river to *Mingun*. There, Daniel arranged for two novices and a nun to be our models with the great unfinished *Mingun Paya* as a backdrop. We shot from three sides to take advantage of direct light and shade. Our nun puffed away on a *whacking white cheroot* provided by Daniel. Over to the giant bronze bell cast for the pagoda then to the wavy white *Hsinbyume Paya* where our three novices were directed by a gaggle of local kids and Daniel to jump from one *wave* to another. The wavy lines represent mountain ranges circling sacred *Mt. Meru*. Seen from above, the pagoda represents the Buddhist cosmos. +2 stops keeps the whites white and the novices' robes red as it was quite bright today. Now we had an hour to explore, shop or relax with a cold drink before meeting at the boat. Back in Mandalay we lunched at the *Golden Duck* Restaurant along the Palace Moat. After lunch we went straight to *Shwenendaw Kyang*, the old wooden monastery that had been removed from the Glass Palace.



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Three novices—one in yellow robes, posed for us here. Our system of primary shooter worked well so that everyone had a chance to get the poses and angle they wanted. Don's friends *MiMi* and *Tit Tee* were as charming as ever posing at their souvenir-cum-antique stalls. *MiMi* has the leaf patterned *thanaka* paste on her cheeks. At the so called world's biggest book, *Kuthodaw Paya*, a very cute little girl was selling sweet garlands of flowers and happily posed for our pictures. The pages of the book are solid marble, written in *Pali* script and represent the sacred texts of the *Tripitaka*. From 4:30 to 6:45 at leisure to shoot the sunset on the jetty along with the village life of the squatters who weave bamboo mats here—Burmese plywood, used for the walls of huts. *Ko's Kitchen* for an outstanding Thai dinner.

Dec. 10—Mandalay environs: A long and eventful day. Out at 8AM to drive to *Mahamuni Paya*—most sacred *gagoda* in Mandalay as this is where the *living Buddha* resides. The tradition is that Sidhartha transferred his essence to this statue before he died. The proof is that the statue sweats (which is understandable under the ton of gold leaf pressed onto him). Don pointed out some good areas and subjects such as the reflections on marble floors and gilded arches especially when a good subject happens by. Old frescos of the Buddha's life hide away in other dark corners. The bronze statues originated from *Angkor Wat* in *Cambodia*. Next is the marble sculpting street where snow white marble quarried nearby is slowly turned into mostly Buddhist statues. Power tools shape the figures then teams of girls polish with stones and bits of emery cloth. At *Amarapura* Monastery we arrived in time to photograph a thousand monks arriving to line up for their last meal of the day (at 10:10 AM). Panning shots of the shuffling feet, the studied concentration on faces, backlit scenes—all were available. In a quiet corner, poor kids had been sent to beg for offerings from the monks returning from the meal with treats from donors. Nearby is the silk embroidery workshop which provided a needed toilet stop as well as some nice images of girls working on fabric that might sell for \$1000 for 2 yards. Crossing the *Ayerwaddy River*, the road to Mandalay, we soon arrived in *Sagaing* at *Aung Myae Oo*, the monastic school founded in 2003 by the monk *Ven U-Vilasa* who has since provided an education for nearly 2000 poor youth from surrounding monasteries and convents. The open windows of the school buildings make great frames for the youngsters who enjoyed seeing their pictures on our screens. We made donations to the Education fund then found lunch at the pleasant open *Saigang Hills Restaurant*. *Saigang* was one of the several old capitals of the region and houses hundreds of religious institutions. We crossed the river on the 1936 British bridge, until very recently the only span across the great *Ayerwaddy*. Nearby we caught a small ferry across the *Ava River* to the site of another former capital of Burma—*Ava* (more properly *Inwa*). At the old yellow brick and stucco *Maha Aungmye Bonzan Paya* Daniel found a monk to pose in the windows and



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arches and we employed the primary shooter technique to great effect—no bitter words until another tourist couple decided to stand in the way—on principle, apparently. On to the old wooden monastery (*Bagaya Kyaung*) where our magician produced two novices in the doorways of the richly carved monastery. At *U-Bein Bridge* we worked out our strategies for capturing the iconic teak bridge as sunset silhouetted those walking across to their homes—some pushing bikes, carrying baskets on their heads or enjoying a quiet cheroot. Some of our group were rowed out to see the bridge up close, others walked half-way across to reach a small island but from my perspective the best scenes were very close by. Tourists with cameras and I-pads raised in supplication outnumbered the locals but we managed to get our pictures all the same. Driving across *Mandalay* in the dark we arrived at a small Burmese restaurant—very tasty. And then to bed.

Dec. 11 Mandalay to Pyin Oo Lwin: Another full day—8 AM departure to the Gold Leaf making workshop where sinewy young men pounded small chunks of gold until it was thinner than tinfoil. Daniel explained the process while we photographed. The coconut timers were clever. In a closed room girls applied the gold to small statues and other objects. On to *Aung Nan Workshop* where there were wood sculptors, puppet repair persons, tapestry seamstresses and a great collection of items to browse and photograph. On the edge of town we found the wholesale flower market where growers from *Pyin Oo Lwin* met up with buyers from Mandalay. Huge bundles of *gladiolas*, *chrysanthemums*, *daisies* and *roses* were then strapped to motorbikes for the journey to the flower shops. All this in the median strip of the highway! The road begins to climb and switch back and forth as we climb from 300' to over 3000'. After a rest stop we pass coffee plantations and on to the *San Francisco Restaurant* in *Pyin Oo Lwin*, known as *Maymyo* during the Raj when British families beat the heat of Mandalay in this hill station laid out by Col. May. After checking into the *Royal Parkview Hotel* we had a 45 minute break then out at 2:15 to visit a monastery a few miles out of town along the Burma Road. School was in session so we filled in as English and Math teachers—very bright kids. With school dismissed, the novices were required to police the monastery grounds. Some very vigorous sweeping raised enough dust to make for interesting shots. Afterwards they all posed on the buttress roots of a giant banyan tree while Daniel taught them how to photograph. We all had a good time. We made a short stop at the waterfall park but we had to work hard to find our images here—which Ian did with the smoke from a small brush fire and back lit trees. At the Pagoda of the Reluctant Buddha (*Aung Htu Kan Tha Pagoda*) we found some nice reflections in a pond. The 17 ton Reluctant Buddha statue, enroute to China, fell off a truck and refused to be reloaded so a very ritzy pagoda was built by the junta. Dinner tonight at the *Parkview*. Don recited Kipling's *Road to Mandalay*, telling the tale of a



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soldier's return home from duty in Burma and how he yearned to return to that cleaner, greener land.

Dec. 12 Pyin Oo Lwin to Bagan: Out at 7:10 this morning. Daniel arranged for a line of monks to walk through the edges of sunlight along a dirt path while we photographed. They made numerous passes and we kept shooting until we got it right. At 8AM we drove to the morning market for scenes of buying and selling of some of the most beautiful and varied produce ever. Downtown at *Purcell Tower* we explored a bit on our own. It was a good opportunity to capture the old horse cabs that have clip clop around town since the 1880's. Conversations with the Nepalese and Indian drivers and merchants were interesting, too. Over to the *Kandawgyi Botanical Garden* to walk past the shockingly colorful and beautiful flower beds to the walk-in aviary where, along with several other native species, three kinds of Hornbills could be photographed. We were as close to the 47" Great Hornbill as our lenses allowed. After this busy morning we collected our baggage, stopping for lunch at *The Club*—a British era bungalow where the food was excellent. Our Mandalay-Bagan flight had been cancelled so now we had a long drive to *Bagan*, arriving about 6:45PM. There was not much to slow us down so our dinner under the old Acacia Tree at the *Thande Riverside Hotel* was not much later than usual. Traditional harp and singing accompanied our meal.

Dec. 13 Bagan's dramatic but dusty past: By 9:15 half of our group had returned from their hot air balloon adventure and were glowing with excitement. John and Ian had returned from their own sunrise adventure to *Shwe-san-daw* Temple, one of the few that tourists are allowed to ascend these days. *Khay-min-gha* was our first stop where the keeper of the keys sat smoking her giant cornhusk cheroot with the coconut-shell ash-catcher. This small pagoda is locked because of the frescos inside. Second stop was at *Htilomillo* (circa 1218), a very large pagoda, also has frescos and great plaster sitting Buddhas facing the four directions. Vendor's stalls lined the courtyard. Several *Padong* women were at one stall attracting customers. Our third stop was *Ananda*—the most important shrine in *Bagan* and is crowded with Burmese visitors. The white corncob-like top indicates Indian influence. Here the four Buddhas are standing and the ones facing North and South are original. The East and West were replaced 500 years ago after being destroyed by fire. The doors are guarded by Nat statues in niches. Lunch was at the idyllic *Sunset View Restaurant* where Bee-eaters sat on the wires and the bougainvillea grew from giant ceramic pots overlooking the meandering river. At 3:45 we were at *Mahuna Paya*—where the captive Mon King *Mahuna* built this Reclining Buddha in a very tiny pagoda as a protest against his own imprisonment. Daniel had the candles for a young novice to light and place on the outstretched hand of the Buddha where he crouched and



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prayed while we photographed, cycling through the narrow enclosure to take turns at the best spots. Then we were off to *Bulethee Pagoda* for sunset shots—best from the second level. Nice scenes with a 300mm and a good sunshade. We stayed until after sunset with the captivating and exotic silhouettes of the dozens of pagodas reminding us that this is a very special place. Delicious dinner tonight at the Puppet Theatre. We enjoyed Daniel's Mandalay Rum Sours while photographing the beautiful backdrops, skilled puppet masters and animated puppets telling their classic tales.

Dec. 14 Mt. Popa and Salay: A very full day by any standard. Several were out before dawn to capture the sun's first rays glinting through the temples. We rendezvous at 8:15 at drive NE towards *Mt. Popa*. The sesame harvesters with temple background were close to *Ananda Paya*. Daniel had a supply of large calendars featuring Burmese heart throbs which pleased them no end. Further east we encountered a crew winnowing peanuts from a bamboo tripod. Further along it was the toddy palm family making peanut oil with a large mortar and pestle powered by an ox. Mikki was able to stir things up a bit. We asked a young man to demonstrate how he climbed the palms to collect the sap from the fruit. The sap can be boiled down to make palm sugar or fermented into wine, which can be further fortified by distilling. We photographed both processes with Don reminding to include the fire's coals in the frame for greater interest. We sampled the hooch (about 35%), snacked on the coconut-jaggary snacks and the tea and *lappet* which they offered to us. A bit further on we spotted the tell-tale signs of an *ordination ceremony* and left the bus to track down the action, stopping in a village compound to meet the farm animals. Along came the procession of five young boys on horseback all dressed like Prince Siddhartha. The young girls were wearing their best, too. The boys heads would be shaved today and they would enter the monastery. We walked through *Mt. Popa village* for overviews and close-ups of the mischievous monkeys then up to *Mt. Popa Resort*—a charming eagle's perch overlooking Mt. Popa's cliff-top temples where the Nats, Burma's spirit pantheon, are said to live. Strawberry mousse for desert. Mt. Popa is a volcanic plug rising straight up from the plain. At *Salay* we first visited the old wooden monastery (*Youqson Kyaung*) with the depictions of the Buddha's past lives and a herd of young novices poking their faces through the carved railings above us. We tried both sun and shade, and then headed across the street to an abandoned white-washed temple. One novice jumped from one dormer to another while we photographed. It was a scene that had happened quite by accident years before and now we had made it an iconic shot for *Faces of Burma*. We did not want the boy to tire and slip so five or six passes were deemed enough. We had a couple of soccer balls for the boys and invited them to demonstrate their skills, running and kicking the ball



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towards us. Girls in a nearby classroom were watching with interest so when Daniel told them he had pictures of all their secret loves they bolted over to get a calendar just as fast and aggressively as the boys had run. Back at *Thande Riverside* we created a new cocktail—the *Nat's Revenge*—with a bottle of the palm toddy hooch, soda, lime and honey. After dinner we met with our incoming tour operator (*Nee Nee Myint*) and her husband to see some of his bird pictures from a new itinerary he was developing. Like I said—a very full day. (The owl in the old acacia tree may be a Spotted Owlet, *Athene brama*, according to Grewal's *Birds of India and Nepal*).

Dec. 15 Bagan to Yangon: Three of our group lifted off at sunrise in the 8-place Balloon for a second look at Bagan from the air. Six of us hired two horsecarts at 5:45 AM to trot over to *Shwe-san-daw* Pagoda for pre-sunrise shots from halfway up the pyramid-like structure. 300mm lens compressed the multitude of temples, smoke and distant hills very nicely to create a “lost in time” effect. By 7:15 the best light was past and we were ready for breakfast. By 9:30 the balloonist and Explorers were reunited for the drive to the *Shwe-zi-gon* Pagoda near the river. The great golden dome inspired a number of compositions. Vendors have recently been banned from inside the temple compound so we did not have immediate access to some of our “models” such as the old lady selling flowers or the vendor with the fresh red slices of watermelon on her head. We found them outside near our bus, though. On to *Sulamani* (ruby) Pagoda (circa 1182) with the elaborate frescos. Daniel arranged for two young novices to pose at the north entrance, backlit, with robes spread, umbrella catching the light and also sitting in the niche where guardian nat statues had once stood. We shot quick as their dinner bell was ringing (last meal of the day for monks is finished before noon). These are exceptional travel shots that include dramatic lighting, exotic subjects and a beautiful unique setting. Our own lunch was at the lovely *Eden BBB Restaurant*. Back at the *Thande Riverside* Hotel we vacated our rooms then spent some time at leisure until 2:30 to swim, explore or rest. Our adventure is coming to a close and takes some processing. At 2:30 we visited *Moe Moe's Lacquerware* workshop in *New Bagan*. Daniel explained the process from weaving bamboo and horsehair bowls, coating with many layers of lacquer then etching traditional but free-hand designs in the final layer. There was a time when everyone had a lacquerware beetle box. The showroom provided an opportunity to obtain those final gifts for the Holidays. Now, we made a sweep counterclockwise around the *Bagan Archelological Site* visiting several sites but it seemed the light was too harsh and contrasty so soon we were at the airport waiting for the flight to Yangon. This is where we said goodbye to John who planned an extension to *Monywa*. In Yangon we said Goodbye to our wonderful Shan Guide, *Sai Woon Sone* who had so beautifully shared his country and culture with us over the last 15 days. *Jai su tin bad deh*, Daniel. Dinner tonight was the



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International Seafood Buffet at the Chatrium—a fitting finish to our time together. Tomorrow, each of us has a transfer to the airport and back to that other life we sometimes call, “the real world.” This writer is off to India to scout a new photo itinerary for 2016—*Rajasthan, People and Places*.

Thanks for joining me--Don